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ABSTRACT

Since the aims and objectives of counseling are different from the aims and objectives of teaching, and since the professional skills and personal qualifications for teaching and counseling are disparate, it is unreasonable to expect the same preservise teacher education program to adequately prepare both classroom teachers and counselors. To expect all teachers to be all things to all pupils is unrealistic, and an attempt to force teachers to act in such an omniscient capacity ultimately detracts from their ability to perform their primary teaching function. The professional education of teachers should, therefore, be separate and distinct from the professional education of school counselors. (LH)

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THE TEACHER AS A COUNSELOR

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Most of those who choose to become school counselors do so from the teaching ranks. Indeed, most states require that school counselors be also certified and experienced teachers. However, to expect teacher training, as currently practiced, to lay a foundation for counseling skills is both unwarranted and unfortunate.

Although there is value in the counselor and teacher being able to share viewpoints, the attitudes and techniques needed for effective counseling are not the same as those needed for classroom teaching. School teachers are expected to transmit knowledge, to encourage scholarships, to pose problems, to drill, review, discuss, to ask and stimulate questions, to grade and rank, none of which is central to counseling procedures. Their training is mainly prescriptive; their approach necessarily normative and standardized; their methods essentially didactic, even if indirectly.

School counselors, on the other hand, must recognize that the counseling process is idiosyncratic, unique, and intuitive. Unlike teaching, counseling is built upon a philosophical foundation which emphasizes a phenomenological world. Its purpose is not to instruct, but to achieve wholeness and integration and to deal with questions of man's essence. As Gary S. Belkin points out in his book, Practical Counseling in the Schools (1975), counseling is built upon an underlying philosophy of man that includes an ontology, an epistemology, and an axiology. Thus, it deals with notions of reality and existentialism, life purpose and universals, ethics and values - areas barely touched upon in most teacher education. How often are courses in ethics and existential philosophy required in teacher-training programs?

Whereas teachers' methods and materials are geared to an orderly and controlled progression of acquired abilities, counselors' roles and resources are keyed to disrupted or abnormal reactions. Prediction and control of behavior are always subject to question and re-evaluation. For this reason counseling must be a dynamic

and spontaneous interchange between two people rather than an exercise in communication according to form. As Belkin states, counseling involves the desire to speculate on metaphysical issues in order to reflect on relationships and human experience: issues such as, does existence define life, or does life define existence?[1] Such questions are basic to practical counseling, for if one's destiny is shaped by oneself, then insights to be derived from counseling determine the shaping.

Not only does the underlying philosophy of counseling differ from that of teaching, but so also do the skills and objectives. The most obvious difference, of course, concerns leader-student ratio, seen in the counselor's one-to-one approach versus the teacher's one-to-many. A teacher tells, explains, cajoles, demonstrates, illustrates, and in all ways attempts to evoke a correct or at least thoughtful response. Indeed, the teacher must elicit such response, else how is he or she to know whether the student hears and understands? Response is measured by performance, participation, written exercises or examinations, so that progress toward a goal may be evaluated. This process invariably involves some structure, even in unstructured classrooms, and leads to at least a degree of classroom learning.

The counselor, on the other hand, wants only for the interviewee to be open, to be aware, to feel, and to "get in touch with himself." He does not seek correct or reasoned answers; indeed, he may not require any answers at all. The counselor understands that the student can respond to others only after he has learned to respond to himself. The counselor proceeds therefore on the premise that it is up to the student to decide whether or not to respond, and he must respect that decision without negative evaluation. As explained by Alfred Benjamin in The Helping Interview (1974), "We can help most...by fully respecting the interviewee and his word and by showing him that we do so, not only by our words but also by our behavior.

Experiencing our attitude, he will become more aware of himself and eventually of us. Feeling respected, he will be able to respect what we may have to contribute."[2] In other words, the counselor enables the counselee to recognize, to decide, and to choose whether to change, whereas the teacher expects and measures change.

It is the teacher's responsibility in his or her instruction to concentrate upon some given subject area. If the attention of the student wanders, the teacher attempts to bring it back in line. An excellent teacher may accomplish this with such expertise that renewed interest is engendered even against the student's inclinations. In any case, attention is directed and focused on a lesson that is generally outside the self. The counselor, on the other hand, invites the student to discuss whatever is on his mind. Attention is neither focused nor directed on any given school topic. The only matter under consideration is the self; not the self that the student may think he ought to be, but the one he is. It is up to the counselor to aid the counselee to explore his own life-space, unhampered by external influences, so that eventually he can take initiative and assume responsibility for himself. It should be apparent that even the most caring teacher cannot be steeped in such sophisticated existential probings. Aside from the fact that this is not his or her job, there simply is not time in the usual classroom situation.

Then too, the style of communication differs markedly between teacher and counselor. A good teacher's communication is pre-planned and carefully prepared. What a teacher says in usually expository and possibly meant to clarify the textbook. Subject material is contained in notes or preferably in memory, and (hopefully) is well organized, interesting, and instructive. Conversely, whatever a counselor says is unpremeditated and spontaneous, the result only of having truly listened. The teacher must know what to say next, but the counselor who insists on knowing what to say next is building a wall between himself and his counselee.

A good counseling session is genuine but unplanned. Unlike the student in the classroom, the student in the counselor's office need not study nor be concerned with right answers but only with genuineness. Eventually the student comes to the astonishing realization that he is not being graded, numbered, tested, or ranked in any way. This is such a rare experience that it takes time for him to drop his fears and suspicions and to yield to the request that he simply reveal himself. In the classroom, an optimum amount of anxiety motivates alert learning, but in the counseling situation anxiety blocks essential openness. The goal is elimination of neurotic anxiety and thereby of self-defeating defense mechanisms.

Good classroom management demands a certain amount of discipline and silence. In the counseling sessions, however, silence has nothing to do with discipline. Rather, it may have profound meaning, being neutral, empathic, confused, deliberate, comfortable, or oppressive. To the counselor, all these silences communicate something. In the classroom, the teacher does most of the talking while the students presumably listen. In the counseling session, the student is invited to do most of the talking while the counselor listens. Only by this process can the counselor bring to the surface and interpret feelings that lie behind the student's words. Teachers are not trained to do this kind of listening and naturally find it counterproductive to the business of imparting facts, concepts, and principles.

Personal relationships with students are different also. A counselor's love generally is less for scholarships <u>per se</u> than for people, their behavior and motives. He likes to contemplate, ponder upon, and try to comprehend the inner life. Thus, for the student to be <u>understood</u> is the most crucial aspect of the helping process, whereas it is not crucial to the teaching process. It is perfectly possible for a student to learn from a detached, impersonal teacher. It is much less likely that he can be helped by a detached, impersonal counselor. Any so-called counselor who is aloof, judgemental, remote, unapproachable, or constrained will soon have few counselees.

In his instructive book on counseling techniques, Benjamin has explained that there are three ways in which one may come to understand another person.[3] One is to know

about him through the eyes of others; that is, primarily from factual data and others' opinions. The second way is to perceive him through one's own eyes and in the light of one's own experience and opinions. The third is to understand with the other; that is, with empathy, in which one adopts that other's frame of reference and sees through his eyes. It is this third way which a conscientious counselor strives to master. He attempts to achieve this in part by disclosing as much of his own humanness as possible. Yet, while sharing in another's life space, he must be sure to maintain his own identity or he can be of no help. This is an extremely sensitive and difficult type of interpersonal communion which cannot be sustained from behind a wall of academic professionalism. Since listening is his primary skill, he must listen with his whole being while empathizing in a personal relationship which is fluid, warm, and not threatening, yet strengthening and healing.

Contrast this with the task of classroom teachers. The teacher certainly may be warm and empathic, but listening is not his primary tool nor can he permit students continually to disinhibit feelings in order to enter their frames of reference. Reasonable scholastic demands must be made. Just how warm and empathic should a teacher be when the student's paper is three weeks late or his insolence is sabotaging class morale? Authoritative action is indicated and punishment sometimes merited (albeit with compassion and a modicum of humor.) If classroom confusion is such that learning cannot take place, it is time for the teacher to impose restrictions and promote a normal level of anxious compliance among students. The teacher's first objective is learning, not therapy.

Finally, whereas the counselor does his best to accept thoughts, feelings, and actions in terms of the counselee's values, the teacher is obligated to consider ideas, attitudes and behaviors in terms of society's values; for, after all, schools are society's public agencies for socialization. That is to say, it is primarily from the schools that children learn about society: its government, mores, structure,

and responsibilities. Unlike the counselor, the teacher is presenting more than his own person; he is presenting society.

These few illustrations might serve to suggest why teacher education cannot properly prepare the teacher to counsel. Teaching is sufficiently demanding in itself. Teacher educators must return to the business of preparing teachers to educate the young, an area in which we have become deflected and inadequate. We must understand that undergraduate courses in behavioral science never were designed to qualify student teachers to be counselors, psychologists, mental health experts, or social reformers.

In this vein, and in commenting upon the plethora of school programs for social change, John C. Sawhill, President of New York University, has said that schools cannot serve two masters at the same time. Attempting to do so has contributed to a sharp increase in functional illiteracy, and has diverted the energies of teachers from their basic purpose, education. During the 1970's, says Sawhill, we have expected our teachers "to look first to the wants of the individual, to nurture a child's discovery of self, while at the same time distracting him from his attempts to reduce his school to rubble;"[4] (perhaps the inarticulate protest of bewildered students who perceive schools as failing in their primary task).

Mainstreaming disturbed children may succeed if such children are able to function at acceptable academic levels. Otherwise they should be given competent counseling outside the classroom, and the teacher should be allowed to get on with the business of strengthening basic academic curricula. Teachers need not be satisfied with "minmum acceptable standards" in a misguided effort to meet every emotional and social need of students. In the counselor's office it is right and proper that the student concentrate on the verb "to be" in its existential and personal essence; in the classroom it is necessary that he be able to conjugate it. But, as Sawhill points out, students cannot learn what they are not taught. We must stress again that schools exist to educate.

Therefore, as teacher educators, let us no longer burden students-in-training with the unrealistic adjuration to be all things to all pupils. Let us be cautious in adopting the kinds of quixotic textbooks which propose to impart life-space interviewing techniques to those least ready for them. Let counselors be drawn from a different breed, which in fact they are. No teacher can function as a full-time, capable instructor and still devote his or her efforts to experiencing each student's phenomenological world.

Let the teacher be trained to teach and the counselor to counsel. Let us not confuse the issues. These are both important, indeed vital skills, but we must beware that they do not cancel each other out so that we are left with an educational vacuum.

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3. Ibid., pp. 42 ff.

4. John C. Sawhill, "Six Lessons about the Limits of our Schools", Chicago Tribune, July 29, 1979.